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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a program that was developed at the University of Texas at Arlington to equip future educational leaders to guide schools through important educational reforms. The program offers a balance of seminars and internship experiences, departing from the traditional university-based delivery of instruction. The evaluation of the program was performed to see if it lived up to its espoused goals and objectives after 1 year of operation. A survey was sent to each administrative intern participant, each mentor principal, and other school administrators associated with the intern and mentor principal. The questions under consideration included: "Was the program a collaborative, field-based effort between the university and the schools?" "Did the program provide an equitable selection and mentoring process for interns?" "To what extent was networking across schools and school districts helpful to the intern and mentor professional development?" and "Was the program a cost-effective venture?" Results indicate that the program had significantly met its initial goals, with all the goals receiving scores of 93.8 percent or higher. All the students in the program successfully completed their master's degree, met certification requirements, and were hired for leadership positions of choice. Further study is indicated to enhance goal and program development. Contains 24 references. (RJM)

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The Evaluation of a Field Based Principal Preparation Program in Texas

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Evaluation of a Collaborative Field Based Principal Preparation Program in Texas

Introduction

There is an increasing shortage of adequately prepared principals to face the challenges confronting schools in today's changing society (Million, 1998, "Study Warns," 1998). Leadership development programs are criticized for not adequately preparing leaders for school and societal changes (Bradshaw & Buckner, 1994, Clark & Clark, 1996). Graduate training in Educational Administration has been severely admonished as having little or no effect on the success of principals and their ability to improve schools (Haller, Brent, and McNamara, Phi Delta Kappan, 1997). There have been extensive calls for reform and increased standards in the preparation of school administrators (Bartel, 1994, Daresh, 1997, Daresh 1994, Daresh & Playko, 1996, Kraus, 1996, Peel & Wallace, 1996). Realizing this, The University of Texas at Arlington in collaboration with Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex school districts has developed a reform based educational leadership program. The Educational Leadership UTA program was developed to equip future educational leaders to guide schools through important educational reforms by providing a program which offers a balance of seminars and internship experiences. Departing from the traditional university-based delivery of instruction, Educational Leadership UTA's participants are trained at field-based, learner-centered sites. This study evaluates whether the program after an initial year of operation is meeting its reform based goals.

a) Purposes

Following the initial implementation of any program, the overriding concern becomes the question of whether or not the program is doing what it purports to do. The

perceptions of the participants involved at various levels need to be ascertained in order to evaluate the preliminary strengths, weaknesses and challenges faced for program success and continuous improvement. Such was the case with Educational Leadership UTA. Did the program live up to its espoused goals and objectives after its initial year? The purpose of this study was to determine if the following program goals were met:

1. Was the program a collaborative field-based effort between the university and the schools?
2. Did the program provide an equitable selection and mentoring process for interns?
3. To what extent was networking across schools and school districts helpful to intern and mentor professional development.
4. Was the program a cost effective venture?
5. Was the program viewed as successful in providing leaders for ethnic minority students in K– 12 schools?
6. As compared to traditional principal preparation, was this field-based program more practical and authentically based?
7. What impact, if any, did the program have on campus improvement?

b) Perspectives or theoretical framework

Colleges have failed to keep up with the changing performance standards by which their graduates must be measured. Major organizations such as the National Council for the Accreditation of Colleges of Education and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium have called for increased standards for principals as well as for state licensure examinations similar to those in law and medicine. In response to these

calls for reform and assessment of entry level skills. Texas has adopted the use of an ExCet Examination for all certified educators requiring successful completion of difficult tests for the principalship and the superintendency. Professional organizations have likewise been active in the last decade calling for more performance based administrator preparation. These include the National Council for the Accreditation of Colleges of Education, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

Educational Leadership UTA is built upon the theoretical framework of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration's Principals for our Changing Schools: Knowledge and Skills Base (Thomason, 1993). This base of 21 domains of leadership coupled with the administrative proficiencies detailed in Learner Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision of Texas Educators (1994) and the recommendations of the Texas Business and Education Coalition are combined to form integrated curriculum for this full time, paid, administrative internship program. Two additional pieces of research are particularly important to Texas principal preparation. They, also, address the need for administrator preparation reform and more authentic leadership development. They are David Erlandson's Principals for the Schools of Texas, A Seamless Web of Professionals (1997) and 21st Century Leaders for the Schools of Texas (1998) published by the Texas Professors of Educational Administration. These two pieces fill out and add value to the theoretical and curricular framework forming Educational Leadership UTA as a field based principal preparation program.

Tying these pieces together, students in Educational Leadership UTA participate in full time university course work for one month during the summers before and after the academic year. The first summer focuses on leadership development. The last summer focuses on futuristic leadership development. During the academic year the students are full time administrative interns on K-12 campuses. Their salaries are paid by their respective school districts, thus minimizing pitfalls of self selection, an intern's commitment to the profession, and their obligation to the program and the district. Schools represented are public, private, charter, and for-profit educational entities. On Wednesdays of each week, regardless of the district or the school, each intern participates in all day seminars designed to integrate theory and practice. Many field trips and guest presenters are utilized to provide the interns with a broad base of leadership development references connecting them as school leaders to the entire learning community. (Cordeiro & Sloan, 1996, Kraus, 1996). The administrative intern – graduate students proceed through the program as a cohort under the direction of a lead professor and guidance of selected and trained mentor principals. An effort is made to provide multiple administrative experiential perspectives at the elementary and secondary levels. Each intern participates in university oral and written comprehensive examinations before graduation which requires 36 graduate hours for the master's degree and 9 additional hours in order to meet the Texas certification requirements. In addition, each student must pass the state ExCet examination for the certification of school administrators in Texas.

c) The problem

There is a logic term called reflexivity. It has tremendous import for whether or not words and deeds associated with a person or a program are perceived as authentic and genuine. If a program and the persons representing it are not seen as reflexive, that is if there is not congruence between what is practiced and what is espoused, the program and its people will be seen as not credible. So, the very first evaluation problem for the fledgling Educational Leadership UTA program had to do with its ability to be seen as "practicing what it preaches." This initial program evaluation problem set out to determine first if the program did, in fact, do what it said it would do during its first year of operation. This problem as a compliance and reflexivity question had to be answered.

For a new educator development program, the perceived effectiveness of the preparation offered to the program participants is a second area that must be evaluated. In this case, is Educational Leadership UTA as an administrator preparation program perceived to provide effective professional development for the aspiring administrators and others associated with it during its first year of operation? A second problem area question about the effectiveness and relevance of the professional development offered had to be answered.

A preparation program may "practice what it preaches" and it may provide effective professional development, but is it cost effective for school or school district to be involved? This is a third problem area that needed evaluating from a programmatic standpoint. Participation in a professional preparation program that depletes resources cannot be perceived as worthwhile for continuation. It must have defined and clearly perceived benefits for the participating schools and districts. A defined benefits/cost effectiveness question had to be answered.

d) Methods, techniques, and modes of inquiry

In order to "practice what you preach," a program must know what it has said and what it fundamentally espouses. A logic and linquistic methodology called noun and verb clustering was utilized to clearly determine the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that fundamentally shape Educational Leadership UTA. Almost every document prepared prior to and for use in shaping the implementation of Educational Leadership UTA was examined. This examination was conducted in order to determine precisely what the program's conceivers had said about their ideal philosophy of administrator preparation, the preferred style of preparation and the success oriented performance standards for demonstrating competence of the participants involved in this principal development program. The original proposal submitted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and the proposal accepted by the initial funding source, The Sid Richardson Foundation, were scrutinized. Each catalog description and course syllabus for the specifically tailored courses was examined. The program brochure, which functions as a contracting agreement between each school district and the university, was studied. Correspondence between school districts and the university as they prepared for the participation of individual applicants, personnel directors, staff development directors, and other superintendency level administrators were analyzed. The facilitator of the conceiving design group who eventually wrote the preparation program in its approved form was interviewed and quizzed periodically. This examination of the program's own words was an effort at clearly defining what was being espoused and where the consistency with those espousals about philosophy, preparation, and costs had to be in

compliance. In other words, we had to determine on what fundamentals this principal preparation program stands and whether or not there was logical consistency between what the program espoused and what it purported to do.

Absolutely clear were the following strong beliefs espoused by Educational Leadership UTA regarding its philosophy, style of interaction, and performance based standard of success. It had to demonstrate a service-oriented collaboration between the university and public school district. A virtually full time internship should actualize a field-based component of the preparation and its development of professional educators. Self selection needed to be replaced by district's "grow-your-own" selection which enhances the district's and the intern's investment as a commitment toward the program's professional development. The final strong belief espoused the need to invest in administrator candidates who had a high likelihood of functioning competently in schools with significant populations of ethnic minority children and their families. The extent to which Educational Leadership UTA as a principal preparation program in collaboration with a given school district can lived up to these espousals in its initial program evaluation is the extent to which a district's investment would reveal clearly defined benefits and be viewed as cost effective.

From these fundamentals, three major programmatic goal areas were defined: a compliance goal area, a professional development-training goal area, and a defined benefits-cost effectiveness goal area. A 24 item survey questionnaire was developed addressing the three goal areas and using a five point Likert Scale, with a rating of 3 or better considered as a positive rating. Internal validity checks were utilized by having more than one question addressing specific issues. These included such concerns as

intern selection, mentor professional development, cost effectiveness, and the preparation of principals which will more adequately address the needs of learners that are students of color. Each survey was question was coded for specific project goals. More than one question addressed each goal. Frequency of response per question was gathered and analyzed by computer. Responses were weighted according to their position on the Likert Scale. Tabulations of administrative interns who completed the program within the 12 month time period, receive their master's degrees, and successfully completed the state ExCet certification examination were studied. In additions, the percentage of interns completing the program and subsequently hired for leadership positions was also delineated.

A survey was sent to each administrative intern participant, each mentor principal, and other school administrators associated with the intern and mentor principal. Certain school district administrators had familiarity with the program, but were not cast in an officially defined role as part of the preparation program. These were often assistant principals who worked along side and informally helped the Educational Leadership UTA interns. Some program stakeholders who had familiarity with the program were from the ranks of central office administration. They either helped to oversee the program or provided school improvement targets around which interns could conduct research or strategizing projects. These persons were directors of bilingual/ESL programs, training and development specialists, deputy and assistant superintendents, and superintendents. The number was 32 persons to which surveys were distributed and to which responses were received.

e) Data sources and evidence

Data was collected on program implementation, intern selection processes, and training for effective governance targeting campuses with ethnic minority student populations. These were defined as campuses that have a minimum of 20% students of color. Data was further collected to establish cross-district networking, to assess the value of intern campus improvement projects, to seek positive or negative perceptions of professional development experiences for both interns and mentor principals, and to get feedback on the program's perceived cost effectiveness. Survey input was designed to identify intern benefits of collaboration through the cohort experience as well as benefits of the mentor-intern relationship. Questions were, further, designed to address the intern's observations about climate of instruction and advocacy for equity and inclusiveness of all demographic groups as espoused through university course work. Intern ability to communicate vision through the governing process was also specifically targeted. Other evidence towards program evaluation included Texas school administrator competency testing, certification standards, and degree requirements. The placement of students in administrative positions upon program completion was a consideration.

f) Results and/or conclusions/points of view

Tabulated results per programmatic goal are listed below:

1. Was the program a collaborative, field-based effort between the university and the Schools? Goal Attainment: 100%
2. Did the program provide an equitable selection and mentoring process for interns? Goal Attainment: 96.9%
3. To what extent was networking across schools and school districts helpful to the

intern and mentor professional development?

Goal Attainment: 100%

4. Was the program a cost-effective venture?

Goal Attainment: 93.8%

5. Was the program successful in providing leaders for minority students in K-12 Schools? Goal Attainment: 93.8%

6. As compared to traditional principal preparation, was this field-based program more practical and authentically grounded?

Goal Attainment: 100%

7. What impact, if any, did the program have on campus improvement?

Goal Attainment: 93.8%

Results indicate that the program has significantly met its initial goals. Specific programmatic strengths were noted in goals 1, 3, and 6 with attainment rates of 100% in each. Goal 2, dealing with equitable selection and mentoring processes is also extremely high at 96.9%. The remaining goals regarding cost effectiveness, providing leadership for minority students, and programmatic impact on school improvement scored lower than the others with individual scores of 93.8%. With all goals receiving scores of 93.8% or higher, the results indicate that the program is meeting its espoused purposes. 100% of the interns successfully completed their master's degree, certification requirements, and were hired for leadership positions of choice. Further study is indicated to enhance goal and program development and to see if the program can be successfully replicated.

g) Educational and empirical significance of the study

Although the field basing of teacher preparation has grown in concept, discussion, implementation, and development particularly during the past decade, the concept of field basing administrator preparation has not received the same attention. Conceptual questions and philosophical discussions as well as cost considerations have dominated discourse regarding the problems involved with field basing administrator preparation (Araki, 1993, Colon, 1994, Thurston & Clift, 1993). Yet, reform is called for in administrator preparation as well as in teacher preparation.

New principal preparation programs must address the troublesome 'clinical

Although universities such as Texas A & M (Zellner & Erlandson, 1997), Florida State (Stakenas, 1994), The University of Washington (Sirotnik & Kimball, 1996), the University of Alaska (Oldaker, 1995) and Brigham Young (Muse & Randall, 1994) have entered into collaborative relationships with schools and school districts, no study has directly addressed evaluation towards goals specified here. Most notable in this study are the goals addressing collaboration, intern selection, mentor input, cost effectiveness, providing leaders for schools with large numbers of students of color, and the effect the program has had, if any, on school improvement. During this first year interns in collaboration with their mentor principals chose such school improvement topics as: peer teacher evaluation, after school programs development, English as A Second Language instruction for recently arriving high school students, induction year professional development for teachers new to a school district, behavioral modifications and physical restraint for non-special education teachers, a Spanish language glossary correlated to state competency tests, portfolio teacher performance assessment, and developing a middle school website. The goal of providing leadership for schools whose

demographics and racial balances are rapidly changing is particularly noteworthy for researchers, as society becomes more diverse (Jacobson, 1996). A multicultural approaches assignment based on Banks' levels (1996) and a curriculum assessment and alignment assignment based on English (1998) addresses a school faculty's readiness to teach and respond to the needs of diverse groups of students. This across the grades focus concentrates the interns and the mentors attention toward school effectiveness for all students.

This study is an effort to evaluate one collaborative model of reform in principal preparation. It raises fundamental evaluative questions about how Educational Leadership UTA works and is espoused to work. In other words, was the program, indeed, a collaborative one between the university and the schools it serves? What benefits, if any, are there for universities to undertake collaborative endeavors between public, private, and charter schools? Is field basing administrator education worth the cost and effort? These are important questions that must be addressed by the field at large. They are addressed in this study with highly favorable results but based on a small target population of administrative interns, their respective mentor principals, and a group of associated school administrators. Replication of this study is warranted and scrutiny of the program in needed as it grows and enlarges its numbers of school districts and participants.

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